

## **Cabinet**

**Monday, 12 June 2017**

**7.30 pm**

### **Present:**

Cllr David Turner (Chair)  
Cllr Leslie Hills (Vice-Chair)

Councillors:           Gurjit Kaur Bains  
                              Julia Burgoyne  
                              Sandra Garside  
                              Samir Jassal  
                              John Knight  
                              Jordan Meade  
                              Alan Ridgers  
                              Anthony Pritchard

**Note:** Councillors: John Burden, Shane Mochrie-Cox, David Hurley, Narinder Singh Thandi, Jenny Wallace and Brian Sangha were also in attendance

Kevin Burbidge	Director (Housing & Regeneration)
Melanie Norris	Director (Communities)
Stuart Alford	Assistant Director (Environment)
Wendy Lane	Assistant Director (Planning)
Mike Bytheway	Service Manager (Revenues & Benefits)
Anita Tysoe	Service Manager (Customer and Theatre Services)
Ben Turner	Corporate Performance Manager
Andrew Barnett	Principal Accountant
Alexendra Jarvis	Principal Accountant
Jackie Denton	Customer Services Manager (Minutes)

### **101. Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from David Hughes, Stuart Bobby, Nick Brown and Sarah Parfitt.

### **102. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 March 2017 were signed by the Chair.

### **103. Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made.

### **104. Delegated Decisions - Cabinet Members**

There were no decisions to report.

## **105. Service Review Team Options for; Planning and Regeneration, Customer and Theatre and DSO.**

On 27 March 2017 Cabinet considered the options generated from the last three Service Reviews of Planning & Regeneration, Customer & Theatre Services and the Direct Services Operation (DSO). Officers were asked to provide a more detailed analysis of how the decisions Cabinet are minded to take could be implemented. This report provides this additional information. The proposals would deliver a total of £450,420 against the required savings target of £415,000.

To ensure effective monitoring of processes a wrap-up report will be brought to the July Cabinet which will outline the savings already realised and those yet to be actioned. Reports will then go to Cabinet on a six month rolling basis.

The detail of the following proposals were discussed:

### **Planning & Regeneration Services**

- Undertake a thorough review of the Development Management function including resources, processes, fees for pre-application advice etc and also look at potential for a shared service for technical/validation team
- Review the Geographical Information System
- Reduce the annual contributions to the Planning Policy reserve
- In the future review the Regeneration and Major Projects Team

### **Customer & Theatre Services**

- Move more internal services into the contact centre enabling the council to reduce the establishment as digital contacts increase and call volumes decline and allow for greater efficiencies in the delivery of service
- Review the structure of Woodville and potentially reduce the current offer

Cllr Garside clarified that despite rumours there are no plans to close the Woodville. Discussions are currently taking place on plans to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Woodville which is next year.

### **Direct Services Operation**

- Introduce a recycling scheme for trade waste, charging property developers for the costs of wheeled bins in new developments, wheeled bin cleaning, in-house collection of clinical waste
- Introduce a nominal fee for the basic family search service
- Review how horticultural services are provided and in particular the Team Green scheme
- Potential for commercialisation of the depot in particular the workshop
- Explore alternative uses for the building at the depot formerly occupied by Apollo

Portfolio Holders to have regular meetings with the relevant officers to monitor progress and to look at timescales for implementation. Cllr Hills to be given an overview of all proposals as they progress.

**Resolved** that subject to any necessary staff or public consultation as outlined within the report, the following proposals are implemented:

### **Planning & Regeneration**

1. Undertake a thorough review of the Development Management function to include a review of resources, processes, fees charged for pre-application advice, etc. and to also look at the potential for a shared service with regards to the technical/validation team. It is anticipated that the review will enable service efficiencies to be implemented.
2. Review the way in which the Geographical Information System (GIS) is used corporately. The Planning Service uses the GIS system but a more corporate approach to this would aid better and more effective data mapping.
3. Reduce the annual contributions to the Planning Policy reserve. The Planning Policy reserve was established in 2011-12 with an annual contribution of £100,000 and officers are asked to detail if the full level of contribution is required.
4. In the future, undertake a review of the Regeneration and Major Projects Team. It is already known that the Service Manager (Major Regeneration Projects) has a fixed-term contract until October 2019 and it is suggested that this post not be filled once this is met realising a saving in 2019-20. A further review of the team and the key projects underway should also be undertaken as this stage.

It is anticipated that the changes to the Planning and Regeneration function will see the council deliver annual budget savings of £146,000.

### **Customer & Theatre Services**

1. Move more internal services into the contact centre. It is anticipated that this will enable the council to reduce the establishment as digital contacts increase and call volumes decline, and will also allow for greater efficiencies in the delivery of the service in the interim. There should also be consideration of the use of an intelligent IVR telephone system to support the work of the department moving forward.
2. Carry out a review to restructure and potentially reduce the current offer from The Woodville, in line with a renewed strategic direction for the Woodville. This will enable the council to continue to offer the breadth of activities currently in place, retain control of the venue and operations, retain artistic control of the programme offered, whilst delivering an overall saving.

To support the proposals set out above, Cabinet approved the strategy for The Woodville 2017-2022. It is anticipated that the changes to the council's Customer & Theatre Services functions will see the council deliver annual budget savings of £49,920 in Customer Services and £61,000 in the Woodville Halls.

### **Direct Service Operation (DSO)**

3. Consider a number of options in respect of Waste and Recycling. These include introducing a recycling scheme for trade waste, charging property developers for the costs of wheeled bins in new developments, looking at potentially introducing new services around house/garden clearance and wheeled bin cleaning and looking to bring back the collection of clinical waste in house. To support all of this, officers are also asked to explore the potential of implementing a software solution to manage

the waste management service, which could also be used in others areas across the depot.

4. In terms of the Cemeteries service, look at the potential of introducing a nominal fee for the basic family search service that is currently offered free of charge. Most authorities do have a charge for this service, even if it is just to cover the admin involved in undertaking the search.
5. Review the way horticultural services are provided by the council and in particular the Team Green scheme. The council has increased its own pool of apprentices and officers should explore using its own resources first.
6. Explore the potential for the commercialisation of the depot, in particular the Workshop element, which may lead to other opportunities moving forward.
7. Explore alternative uses for the building at the depot formerly occupied by Apollo, as this is currently being used for storage.

It is anticipated that the changes to the council's Direct Services Operation (DSO) functions will see the council deliver annual budget savings up to £193,500.

In addition, it was agreed that the Chief Executive be authorised to take all necessary financial, legal and practical actions in relation to implementation of the savings proposals, with the necessary budget amendments being incorporated into the revenue and capital estimates for 2017-18 and beyond.

## **106. Corporate Performance Update: Q4 2016-17**

This report provides Cabinet with an update against the adopted Performance Management Framework, as set out within the council's Corporate Plan 2015-19, for the period January to March 2017 and is for information only.

The Performance Management Framework presents a range of performance information including Performance Measures which are target-based and essential to the delivery of the Corporate Plan's key objectives and Performance Indicators which represent contextual performance information where the council has influence but does not ultimately have direct control over their outcomes.

This report presents statistical data for Quarter Four 2016-17 and shows there are seven performance measures which have met their set target and eight which have not met their set target.

Cllr Hills stated that the new Framework is very effective and highly regarded and goes hand in hand with the Corporate Plan. It is appropriate to show that we have fallen short in some areas but generally the council is performing well particularly in relation to business rates and council tax where we are exceeding targets and our efforts in corporate fraud are exceptional. We do set our targets high and we are ambitious. We are looking at how our targets could be refined and this is an on-going piece of work. For the vast majority there is comparative information and each Cabinet Portfolio holder should seek from senior officers those comparative findings and agree appropriate targets for future years.

Cabinet noted the information contained within the report

## 107. Provisional Outturn reports - General Fund and Housing Revenue Account

This report provides details of the provisional budget outturn for the 2016/17 financial year and complements the draft 2016/17 Financial Statements for the authority which will be subsequently considered by the Finance & Audit Committee. The report is for information only and is still subject to the external processes.

The Executive Summary covers the key points which are:

### General Fund (Revenue)

- Year-end underspend £737,450
- Minimum working balance £1.25m
- General Fund reserve £2.00m
- Usable working balances £2.91m

In terms of significant variances:

- Investment income deficit of £240k
- Property acquisitions – Network House and Springhead Enterprise Park secured a rental stream of £288k
- Council Tax collection fund overall surplus of £100k
- Business Rates Income: £313k favourable variance due to timing constraints in relation to the NNDR1 form return. In addition year-end benefit of £193k resulting from the Kent Pool arrangement
- Supplies and Services – council holds central fund to act as safeguard against inflationary increases to contract payments and general supplies and services costs. Reduced call on this in 2016/17 giving an underspend of £133k
- Reduced provision for bad debts – reduced requirement giving underspend of £192k
- Further benefits come from surplus income from planning and other income streams
- Staffing budgets – regular monitoring to Management Team has resulted in a favourable variation of £262k
- General Fund Working Balance including minimum GF Working Balance - £6.16m
- Minimum GF balance - £1.25m
- Additional GF Reserve - £2m
- General Fund Reserves - £7.1m at year-end (increased from £6.8m)
- General Fund Capital Programme – Final out-turn spend of just over £13m – vast majority relates to property acquisition programme

### Housing Revenue Account

- Out-turn position for 16/17 a surplus £1.8m compared to the Original Budget surplus of £813,070
- Favourable variances – combination of savings generated by managing staffing, reduction of bad debt, rental income from service charges, contribution from Kent Fire for sprinkler systems
- Adverse variances include contribution to capital programme and higher depreciation charge for housing stock
- HRA Working Balance at year-end of £3m maintained – increase in reserves of £1.8m

### Housing Capital Outturn

- Actual spend on Housing Capital schemes for 2016/17 was £8,795,240
- Final out-turn for HRA Capital Programme - £8.3m

- Final out-turn for Housing GF Capital Programme - £467k (Underspend on Disabled Facility Grant will be carried forward into 2017/18)

Cabinet noted the information contained within the report

### **108. Planning Fee Increase**

Cabinet was presented with a report which outlines the government's proposal to allow Local Authorities to increase the nationally set planning fee by 20% if they commit to invest the additional fee income in their planning department.

The Assistant Director (Planning) gave a brief summary of the council's intention to use this flexibility and implement a 20% increase in national planning fees. Originally this fee increase was intended from 1 July 2017 but, with the snap election being called, there was insufficient time for the legislation to be made before the purdah period came into being. Therefore the fee increase cannot be implemented from 1 July but will be implemented at a later date, as yet unspecified.

Cabinet noted the information contained within the report.

### **109. Fleet Leisure Project Update**

Cabinet was presented with a report to update on the future re-development of the site formerly known as Fleet Leisure and to seek authority to advertise for external organisations to invest, develop and manage the site as a sports and leisure facility linked to a long term lease.

The Director (Communities) elaborated on the project. In March 2015 it was agreed to extend the leisure centre contract with Gravesham Community Leisure Ltd (GCLL) to 2025 and include Fleet Leisure. A series of feasibility studies took place and project costs which were originally estimated to be around £2.6m were now estimated to be closer to £2.9m. At this time Ebbsfleet United Football Club decided not to be a major partner and long term hirer of the facility and so would have an impact on the income of the project. Structural surveys highlighted the poor condition of the site and that there would be major financial risk for the council and GCLL. There has been strong interest in the site and therefore following the decision not to carry on with the proposed project plan with GCLL the council will carry out a formal tender process to assess the most appropriate development scheme and partner organisation going forward.

Extending the leisure centre contract for a further period of up to five years allows the council time to assess the long term future of the leisure centres.

**Resolved** that Cabinet hereby authorises the Director (Communities), in consultation with the Leader of the Executive, Head of Legal and the Director (Corporate Services), subject to consideration of all due diligence, legal, financial, procurement and contractual issues to take all necessary actions in relation to;

- Advertise the sport and leisure facility opportunity to perspective external organisations via appropriate advertising publications.
- Develop an evaluation framework for assessing any expressions of interest made.

- Award a long term lease to preferred partner organisation, subject to Planning.
- To continue negotiations with GCLL on a contract extension period up to 2025 for the leisure centres.

### **110. Draft Discretionary Rate Relief Policy 2017/18**

The draft Discretionary Rate Relief Policy has been prepared following a review process and aims to replace the current criteria to assess an organisation's eligibility to discretionary rate relief.

The draft policy has been agreed by the Internal Audit Team and will make the process more efficient and easier for businesses to understand and allows for more transparency. The main aim is to make it clear when making a decision what criteria we have used and the type of circumstances that would not be accepted and what we would accept.

Members have requested more involvement in the decision making process but it was agreed that the criteria is clear. Members could, however, encourage more businesses to apply for the benefit.

**Resolved** that the council approve and fully implement the draft Discretionary Relief Policy, subject to discussion with the Director (Corporate Services) and final decision to be made in conjunction with the Chief Executive and Leader.

### **111. Cross Party Group - Amendments to Terms of Reference - Report to Follow**

This report provides Members with an update on the activity undertaken by the Property Cross-Party Working Group since its establishment and to seek agreement to amendment of the Terms of Reference for the group to include consideration of development opportunities in light of ongoing reductions in central government support.

**Resolved** that the amended Terms of Reference be agreed.

### **112. Exclusion**

**Resolved** that the public be excluded from the meeting because it is likely that in view of the nature of business to be transacted there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

### **113. Housing Benefit Overpayment Write Off**

Approval was sought from Cabinet to write off an amount of unrecoverable debt as a result of outstanding Housing Benefit Overpayment.

**Resolved** that the Council would write off the debt of over £16,289.54.

### **Close of meeting**

The meeting ended at 8.50pm